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John D. Finney

ST. LOUIS, October 13, 1883.

*Hon. Thos. T. Crittenden, Governor of Missouri, Your
Excellency:*

In opening this, the third chapter of my history of your administration, as Governor of the good State of Missouri, I feel, as did M. Thiers when he undertook to write the "Consulate and Empire of Napoleon." Without at all comparing myself to that great historian, I yet may say that each of us had one thing in common, namely the good fortune to be cotemporary with our hero. I can go farther and state that I, like him, am oppressed with the voluminous details within my reach, all of which are to be examined thoroughly and sifted conscientiously before I can present them to the world with the undeniable stamp of truth.

If your Excellency would, for only a moment, look through your own eyes instead of those which so gorgeously bedizen the tail feathers of the peacock usually overhanging your brow, you would be amazed at the vast labor which is mine, in attempting to play the part of Boswell to your Johnson. Here I sit, surrounded with letters, newspapers, and affidavits from every section of the State — all from Democrats — not alone from the betrayed leaders who have been twitted with your malefactions on every rostrum in Ohio, Indiana, Iowa, and Kansas, but from the bone and sinew of the party, each clamoring that I should give public expression to their disgust. Your Excellency will readily imagine how difficult this is to do, and will probably deprecate my hardihood in attempting so superhuman a task.

In my defence, I may allege that I am still young, — about your own age, — and as the great French Cardinal has said: "In the lexicon of youth, there is no such word as fail."

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Since my last chapter your record runs thus: In the Criminal Court of St. Louis, on the 18th day of April, 1877, one Sam Smith, a negro, pleaded guilty to murder in the second degree and was sentenced to the penitentiary for ten years. Sometime after the incoming of your administration, in flat violation of the law, he was assigned to the corps of striped janissaries guarding the person of your Excellency. In this capacity he won your favor, and on the 3d of January, the day upon which the General Assembly convened, he received an unconditional pardon. Repairing to the capitol, all wreathed in grins, and in his own musical vernacular, he said: “ De Gubnor is gwine to gib dis chile a place in de legislachar ! ” This negro murderer’s name, through your influence, appeared on the pay-rolls of the House on that same day, and he drew his two dollars *per diem* until the Speaker’s hammer fell for the *sine die* adjournment. As this is the only exhibition of gratitude I have ever known you to make for non-pecuniary favors, I hesitate before condemning it. In fact, as you are still alive and in office, I do not think I am derelect as a historian in suggesting that should ever a similar occasion arise you ought to advise the nigger to keep your secrets.

Upon page 90, of the State Auditor’s Report, will be found an entry of \$80, paid to the Simmons Hardware Company of this city, for “ the apprehension of criminals and suppression of outlawry.” On first reading it, I was somewhat puzzled. The general impression obtained that this enterprising firm was engaged solely in the trade of hardware, cutlery, etc. The apprehension of criminals and the suppression of outlawry did not appear to be within the purview of their legitimate business. It is true that the senior member of the firm accepted from you the office of Police Commissioner, but finding that as fast as he caused criminals and outlaws to be convicted and jailed, you interposed your executive pardon, he, with his two honest colleagues, retired in disgust. I thought it my duty, as your historian, to inquire into the matter. I found that

the \$80 was accounted for in the fact that the firm had simply filled your order for four No. 44 Smith & Wesson revolvers, of the same pattern used so effectively in the murder of Jesse James, under your order, by that genial museum curiosity, Mr. Robert Ford. Did I not feel that it would be lowering my dignity as a historian, I would advise that after your retirement from office you and Bob Ford should pose in all the dime museums of the country (you as plotter and he as executioner), with considerable profit to both. But passing that, let me here tell the use to which these weapons were put. A coterie of wags, originating in this city and having accomplices throughout this and adjoining States, with exemplary lack of judgment, took it into their heads to send you letters from all points of the compass, threatening your precious life for your complicity in the murder of Jesse James. To these letters the signature of Frank James, or some of his friends, was deliberately forged. Almost simultaneous with their receipt, and when they had worked on you to such an extent that the footfall of a mouse would make you dance like a boy unexpectedly stung in the rear by a hornet, the *Sedalia Democrat*, at that time edited by Major Edwards, asked the following momentous question: "What right had any officer of the State to put a price upon his (Jesse James') head, and hire a band of cut-throats and highwaymen to murder him for money?" You knew these words were intended for you. At the height of the terror they occasioned, the pistols arrived. Secreting one about your own person, you handed one to your private secretary, another, as I am informed, to the janitor of the Capitol, and the fourth to Mr. John T. Clarke, chief clerk in the Auditor's office. Having thus placed your guns in position with the old time generalship you so often displayed as lieutenant-colonel of militia, your nerves began to resume their ordinary equilibrium. In fact, the disposition of your troops was most ingenious. Mr. Clarke's desk is immediately across the hall, opposite to your

office. You hoped that when Frank James, upon vengeance intent, should place his hand on the knob of your door, Mr. Clarke would play the role of Bob Ford, and brain him with a bullet from behind. You could then have asserted with Richard III., "The murder would then have been his, not mine." But Mr. Clarke is quite an observer of human nature, so, instead of sitting at his door from rising morn till dewy eve, with a cocked pistol in his hand, waiting for Frank James, he quietly carried your weapon into his inner office and, after pigeon-holing it as a sacred relic of your style of suppressing outlawry, sat down in his easy chair and laughed and laughed and laughed. It is chronicled that his laughter continued from day to day, until you asked him to pay out of the funds of the State your personal subscription to the *Sedalia Democrat*, when it suddenly stopped and has not since been resumed. Frank James did not come; but always expecting him, with that fearful apprehension of death which haunts the guilty mind, you opened negotiations inviting his surrender. What the nature of the contract between you may be is not entirely known, but there is little doubt that you promised he should not be hung, and he that you should not be assassinated. Accordingly, the gentleman bandit shortly thereafter shook hands with you in your office.

In your last message to the Legislature you urged an appropriation to purchase the portraits of the various Governors of this State. Your personal vanity in this recommendation was plainly apparent. When the appropriation bill was under discussion in the House, an amendment was offered designating the sum of \$4,500 for the purpose. Then uprose Mr. Swetnam, of Clay, and speaking to the amendment, said: "Mr. Speaker, the State of Missouri has had some Governors who were statesmen. I respected, honored, and loved them. The last of this noble band was succeeded in office in January, 1881. She has had other Governors I never care to see or hear of. Could the portraits only of the true and good be purchased and nailed to

these walls, I would vote for the appropriation. But, sir, from the sacrifice of purchasing portraits of shysters, the corrupt and the false, who have crept into that exalted office, may God save the member from Clay." Of course the proposition was overwhelmingly voted down.

You have been hoarsely clamorous for the enforcement of the alleged Sunday-law in St. Louis, going so far as to basely impugn the motives of the honest judge, who decided that it did not apply to this city. And as if this exhibition of your malignity were not enough, in a fit of rage you threatened to call an extra session of the Legislature, hoping that that body would enforce upon the denizens of this great metropolis your hypocritical Puritanism. And yet you had before you the report of the committee of the last General Assembly, appointed to investigate the affairs of the penitentiary, which points out your deliberate and continuous nullification of the law forbidding the employment of State convicts at the Executive Mansion. These convicts have charge of your horses and cows, they wash your linen and perform every menial service in and about your official residence, entirely without compensation and in total disregard of section 6512 of the Revised Statutes. What an exhibition of consistency! Alas, that noble attribute of a well-governed mind is outside your intellectual ken, and the consciousness of shame has no part in giving to your cheeks that delicate rosy hue which, coloring your sweet alluring smiles, makes you the gubernatorial Adonis of these United States. *Adonis et preterea nihil.*

The bill establishing a bureau of labor statistics passed by the Thirty-second General Assembly provided that *immediately after its passage* the Governor by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, should appoint a commissioner. You approved the bill on the 23d of March and during the two days thereafter, caused the Senate to be secretly polled with a view to ascertain whether the name of Mr. Henry A. Newman would be favorably received by that body. A friendly Senator informed you that it would



not, whereupon you waltzed over to Kentucky as a volunteer witness for the Louisville *Courier-Journal* in a suit for libel, hoping thereby to enlist the powerful aid of Mr. Henry Watterson in behalf of your amusing delusion that you are a fit man for the Vice-Presidential nomination on the Democratic ticket of 1884. Tittlebat Titmouse Crittenden for Vice-President of the United States!! Oh, ever dear and venerated shade of the immortal Don Quixote, arise in thy valor, throw off the cerements of the grave and fly to the assistance of the last scion of thine ancient house. Array him in thine own impenetrable armor, place in his hands thy redoubtable lance, mount him upon thy faithful Rosinante, bid Henry Newman attend as his loyal Sancho Panza and sound the bugle note heralding his entrance to the field, for none of thy most entertaining stupidities have ever rivalled this one of his! Vice-President of the United States! What lesson does the old fabulist teach in telling the story of the toad who endeavored to swell himself to the size of an ox? Is it to beware of ambition? No, but to regard the eternal fitness of things. Ambition is the noblest of the vices. When it espouses civic virtue it gives incarnation to the loftiest aspirations of the human soul. From its loins spring Hampdens, Sobieskis and Washingtons. “Kings it makes gods, and meaner creatures kings.” In our own beloved State, as chieftains among its offspring, have shone the great Benton, the heroic Frank Blair, the noble Sterling Price, and the stern old statesman, John S. Phelps. The virtuous ambition of these men has illuminated the story of their lives upon the most absorbing pages of Missouri’s history.

But ambition is not to be identified with its bastard brother—love of notoriety. The former ennobles, the latter enslaves. So long as this passion for notoriety retains its virginal idiocy it only provokes good-natured laughter, and dies without issue. But when it lives in incestuous concubinage with avarice, treachery and mendacity the world stands aghast at its progeny of Beau Brummels,

Benedict Arnolds, and Tom Tit Crittendens. Vice President of the United States ! When you reach that exalted position butterflies will hatch buzzards in thimbles, and kangaroos will teach philosophy in the halls of Howard University. *Howard*

Immediately upon the adjournment of the Legislature, having successfully defied the law, you appointed Mr. Newman. Folding him in your clammy embrace, you bade him go forth among the forges, workshops and trades-unions of the horny-handed sons of toil and fasten them to the support of delegations that would be favorable to your demented hopes on the National Convention. But these stalwart men of brawn have locked their doors against your emissary, and have refused him all recognition, not for any special demerits of his own, but because they regard him as the organizer of your degraded political fortunes.

Your management of police affairs in this city, opening with corruption, has since been a shifting panorama of high comedy and low farce. In conformity with your solemn engagement to the gamblers of this city, you appointed Messrs. Boland and Kinkead Police Commissioners, with the advice and consent of Mr. Warren McChesney. That gentleman having duly and generously paid for this favor, nevertheless thought it advisable to take a mortgage upon these two saints. In drawing it up he constituted your excellency the trustee, and himself the holder of the notes. Dropping metaphor, he took their blank resignations, addressed to you, to be filled up at such time as, in his judgment, they should become forgetful of their duty to the public. Still, this not giving you and your estimable confreres a majority of the board, you were ordered to displace the two commissioners appointed by Gov. Phelps. You did so. The scene then changed. Their places were to be filled, and an outcry had arisen at your action. Mr. McChesney retired temporarily from the stage, but your excellency kept a view of it from the wings. Mr. Thos. E. Tutt entered, and, approaching Mr. Charles Green, ten-

dered him, in your name, the appointment of Police Commissioner, with the proviso that *you* should have his blank resignation. Mr. Green refused in words of indignant contempt, and bade Mr. Tutt tell you that the Governor of Missouri did not know him, else he would not have made so infamous a proffer. Mr. Tutt's high reputation is now, and has always been, beyond cavil in this community, and Mr. Green stands in the very front of our eminent citizens. I therefore challenge either of these gentlemen to deny the foul deception you practised on Mr. Tutt, or the ignominious humiliations you sought to impose on Mr. Green.

In furtherance of this history I simply note here that while you have not yet been three years in office you have appointed eleven police commissioners, every one of whom has already or will certainly be betrayed.

Mr. E. A. Hitchcock, foreman of the last grand jury, the same gentleman from whom in the same capacity, three years ago, you claimed to have received sufficient cause to remove the appointees of Gov. Phelps now tells you that there is a vast gambling ring in St. Louis and calls upon you to investigate the matter. I unhesitatingly tell Mr. Hitchcock that you will not do it; *that you dare not do it*; that he might as well expect Frank James to get up before a jury impanelled to try him for his life, and tell them the history of his crimes. Mr. McChesney has been indicted, but whether adjudged innocent or guilty, he is as safe from punishment during your administration as though he were lord chief justice of England.

Your career as Governor of this State stands alone. It is without a model and defies imitation. It baffles criticism and exhausts invective. It was the pity of yesterday, it is the apprehension of to-day, it will be the derision of to-morrow, and when you lay it down at the feet of your successor, the sonorous "amen" that will rise from a hundred thousand Democratic voices will make the welkin ring with a joyous acclaim. A distinguished Republican editor thus epigrammatically describes it: "Crittenden alternates be-

tween knavery and folly. When any one wants him to do a foolish thing they mostly approach him on his knave day. When any one wishes him to do a knavish act they are likely to suggest it on his fool day, and when anything honest is desired he is invariably absent from the State.”

Of all the distinguished men who were elected with you on the Democratic ticket, you have secured the respect of not a single one. The Lieutenant-Governor reposes in serene indifference to your follies. The Auditor is disgusted with your avarice. The Treasurer is chagrined at your trickery in garbling his report in your message to the Legislature. The Secretary of State turns up his nose at your sham Democracy, which, like a child’s soiled linen, must be aired every day before it can again be pinned to your political principles. The bluff, honest Register of Lands disavows all responsibility, as a co-ordinate officer, for your acts; while the Attorney General is constantly wondering in what new and ridiculous position you will place him as “law officer of the crown.”

In all this recital of your strange, eventful career, I have followed the advice of Othello. I have extenuated nothing, nor set down aught in malice, but spoken of you as you are. Allow me to close the chapter in the words of the great English Unknown, in his letter to the Duke of Grafton: “It is the historian’s office to punish, though he cannot correct. I do not give you to posterity as a pattern to imitate, but as an example to deter; and as your conduct comprehends everything that a wise and honest governor should avoid, I mean to make you a negative instruction to your successors forever.”

I am, &c., &c., &c.,

JOHN D. FINNEY.

S. Z. ^{Gift} Armstrong

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